

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Crisis Line
Newsletter Content for the Holiday Season
Nov. 9, 2015**

Nine Ways to Identify Someone in Crisis This Holiday Season

The holiday season often means three things: family, food, and football. But for some of us, this time of year can mean stress, depression, or feeling overwhelmed. Obligations or isolation can heighten these feelings until they are impossible to handle alone. It's important to recognize when emotions reach a crisis point — especially when thoughts of suicide arise. Learn to recognize these nine warning signs in yourself or someone you care about.

Signs of crisis to look out for include:

Experiencing mood swings

Moving between seeming normal one minute and down-and-out or abnormally cheerful the next — without a reasonable explanation — can be a sign of crisis. Mood swings that go beyond the good and bad days that most people experience, occur without cause or warning, or have the power to disrupt the day, affect relationships, and make it impossible to concentrate, may also be a sign of crisis or even a precursor to suicide.

Feeling hopeless, as if there is no reason to live or no way out

Hopelessness, often associated with depression, can manifest itself in a number of ways. Some people who have lost hope feel powerless, while others feel there is no point in living. Hopelessness may be accompanied by feeling trapped or as if there is no way out of a situation. Thoughts, feelings, or behaviors associated with hopelessness are serious signs of crisis.

Engaging in risky activities without thinking

When they are out of the ordinary, dangerous behaviors, like recklessly driving a motorcycle or car, gambling away large sums of money, or starting fights, may be a sign of crisis. When someone becomes unconcerned about causing injury or harm to him or herself or others through risky activities, it's time to reach out for help.

Abusing alcohol or drugs

Many adults enjoy an alcoholic beverage now and then, but when consuming alcohol becomes a daily habit, a sleeping aid, or a reason to get out bed in the morning — or interferes with daily life — it may be a sign of crisis. Using drugs that are not for medical purposes is also a warning



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sign that someone may be in emotional pain. Recent onset of alcohol or drug abuse is especially worrisome.

Withdrawing from family and friends

Spending less time with friends and family and more time alone, no longer engaging in the activities that used to be pleasurable, or avoiding social interactions of any kind can be signs of distress or, in the worst case, an impending suicide attempt. People can isolate themselves for a number of reasons, but it is almost always a sign that something is seriously wrong.

The following signs require immediate attention:

Thinking about hurting or killing yourself

Whether a person has passing thoughts about suicide, experiences frequent or nearly continuous suicidal thinking, or actually begins a routine of self-harm, all of these behaviors point to dangerous levels of crisis and should be handled by a professional immediately.

Looking for ways to kill yourself

If a person spends time considering how to kill him or herself — pondering the details of the most effective methods, doing research online, or even making plans for a suicide attempt — this sign of suicide risk should be taken very seriously and requires professional intervention.

Talking about death, dying, or suicide

Even passing comments about suicide, or comments about “going away for good” or “not being around anymore,” should *never* be taken lightly. Whether people say they wish they could go to sleep and never wake up or talk about “how they would do it” if they decided to kill themselves, it’s important to read between the lines and recognize when someone may be in suicidal crisis. Their comment may actually be a sign they want help.

Engaging in self-destructive behavior, such as drug abuse or reckless use of weapons

When reckless behavior escalates to the point of almost certain self-harm or death, such as overdosing on drugs or harming oneself or others with a weapon, that person and potentially others are in immediate danger, and it is time to reach out for help immediately.

If you or a Veteran you know is exhibiting any of these signs, call the [Veterans Crisis Line](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net) at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/chat), or text to 838255 to get confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Veterans Crisis Line responders — some of them Veterans or family members of Veterans



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themselves — understand what you or your loved one may be going through, and they can provide guidance and support if times get tough this holiday season — or anytime.

For someone going through a difficult time, one simple act has the power to make a difference. Reach out to the Veterans and Service members in your life today and let them know they're not alone. One conversation can open the door to support.



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